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Spinoza, Carr, and the ethics of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*

SEÁN MOLLOY*

Abstract. This article reads Carr through the lens of Spinoza's ethics, and Spinoza through the prism of Carr's IR Theory. The argument of the piece is that there are significant parallels in the ethical projects of both writers, which upon further examination reveal important aspects of global political life and the nature and limits of ethics in International Relations. The close, critical examination of Spinoza and Carr undertaken in this article also sheds light on the most controversial aspect of Carr's career, his advocacy of appeasement in Nazi Germany.

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The rediscovery of Realism as an ethical theory of International Relations (IR) is arguably one of the more important developments in the discipline since the turn of the century – although well known to experts on Realist theory, Realism's ethical commitments and powerful critiques have until recently been largely ignored or misunderstood by its critics.¹ Realism is establishing itself not simply as a strategic theory of IR but as a serious alternative to more entrenched ethical discourses within IR. The majority of this work has centred round the figure of Hans J. Morgenthau, either in his own right, or as part of an intellectual tradition that encompasses a range of thinkers from Thucydides and Aristotle to Nietzsche and Weber.² The focus on Morgenthau is essential, given both his centrality to the Realist tradition and the very prominent role ethical considerations played within his thought. This focus, however, has led to the neglect of other approaches to international ethics within the family of ideas referred to as Realism. Perhaps the most significant neglected

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¹ See Seán Molloy, 'Hans J. Morgenthau Versus E. H. Carr: Conflicting Conceptions of Ethics in Realism', in D. S. A. Bell, *Political Thought and International Relations: Variations on a Realist Theme* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 83–4.

² See, for example, Alasdair Murray, *Reconstructing Realism: Between Power Politics and Cosmopolitan Ethics* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997); Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests, and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Michael C. Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

figure in the pantheon of Realist ethical thinkers is E. H. Carr. Although some mention of his treatment of ethical themes has been made in several excellent studies since the 1990s, there have been few treatments dedicated specifically to this dimension of his work.³ This relative neglect of Carr is puzzling given his attention to the question of international morality, which he regarded ‘the most obscure and difficult problem in the whole range of international studies’.⁴ The premise of the article is that there is much to be gained from reading Carr in the light of Spinoza – a figure cited in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, but whose significance lies almost as much in what Carr fails to recognise as in what Carr identifies as important in the Dutch philosopher’s contribution to Realism in IR.⁵ This article then is both a clarification of the relationship between Carr and Spinoza, but also an investigation of the deeper and broader parallels between Realist ethics and Spinozist philosophy.

Fittingly, given Spinoza’s occupation as a lens grinder, the article proceeds by means of refraction: investigating Carr’s ethics through the lens of Spinoza’s philosophy, and Spinoza’s potential contribution to IR through Carr’s ethics. The advantage of reading Carr and Spinoza in tandem is that Spinoza, a figure neglected if not completely ignored within IR compared to other political philosophers such as Kant and Hobbes, can enter its thought world and Carr, a theorist with much to offer ethics, gain a greater role within IR’s ethical discourse. The argument of the article is not so much that Spinoza was a defining influence on Carr, but that the degree of convergence between their positions is significant in its own right, whether the convergence is by design, coincidence, or as in the case of Nietzsche, ‘instinctive’.⁶ The first part of the article examines Carr’s depiction of Spinoza, which I argue is not so much inaccurate as incomplete. The second part seeks to recover the valuable insights of Spinoza on the nature of politics and ethics that Carr ignores or neglects. The third section assesses Spinoza by reference to Carr’s critique of Realism in *The Twenty Year’s Crisis*, finding that Spinoza is not a ‘pure realist’ by Carr’s standards, but rather a plural or hetero-realist. The final section examines Carr’s own position on international ethics by reference to the Spinozist understanding of ethics as being primarily governed by the preservation of the self, the promotion of self-interest, and the power of the emotions and the crucial distinction between ethics and morality. Viewing Carr through Spinozist lenses and Spinoza through the prism of *The Twenty*

³ The two most developed pieces specifically dedicated to Carr’s ethics are Paul Rich, ‘E. H. Carr and the Quest for Moral Revolution in International Relations’, Michael Cox (ed.), *E. H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2000); and Seán Molloy, ‘Hans J. Morgenthau Versus E. H. Carr: Conflicting Conceptions of Ethics in Realism’, in D. S. A. Bell, *Political Thought and International Relations. Variations on a Realist Theme* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Excellent general studies of Carr’s life and work include: Jonathan Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity: E. H. Carr, 1892–1982* (London: Verso, 2000); Charles Jones, *E. H. Carr: A Duty to Lie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Michael Cox’s introduction to the 2001 edition of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). For the IR context in which Carr operated see Peter Wilson, ‘Carr and his Early Critics: Responses to The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1939–46’, in Michael Cox (ed.), *E. H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2000); and Peter Wilson, ‘The Myth of the First Great Debate’, *Review of International Studies*, 24:5 (1998).

⁴ Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis*, p. 135. Carr used the terms ethics and morality interchangeably.

⁵ Necati Polat indicates an affinity between the Realist and Spinozist projects in *Alternatives*, 35 (2010), p. 321.

⁶ In a letter to Franz Overbeck, Nietzsche writes: ‘I have a precursor, and *what* a precursor! I hardly knew Spinoza: what brought me to him now was the guidance of instinct’, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Christopher Middleton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1969), p. 177.

Years' Crisis also allows greater understanding of Carr's most controversial policy prescription, the appeasement of Nazi Germany.

Carr on Spinoza

As Carr is one of the few IR theorists to engage with Spinoza his texts are the perfect location to commence, but not conclude, an investigation of Spinoza's potential contribution to IR. At first glance, the significance of Spinoza to E. H. Carr is relatively minor. Spinoza is presented, along with Bodin and Hobbes, as an inheritor of the 'extraordinary vigour and vitality' of Machiavelli. As a Realist, Spinoza is identified with three tenets: firstly, that history is understandable through the analysis of cause and effect, secondly that theory should be derived from practice, not practice from theory, and finally that politics is not a function of ethics, but rather that ethics is a function of politics.⁷ Spinoza's particular contribution to the Realist tradition for Carr comprises four elements. The first element is Spinoza's belief that 'practical statesmen had contributed more to the understanding of politics than men of theory'. This benefit is attributable to the insights of statesmen being derived from experience and hence useful in terms of practice, in contrast to the airy abstractions of men of theory, philosophers, and theologians. The second element of Spinoza that Carr identifies as significant is his emphasis on the laws of nature – that the human being is a part of nature and obeys its laws like any other part. According to Carr, this 'opens the door' to determinism, that human behaviour obeys these iron laws in a predictable manner. Spinoza, in Carr's reading, establishes a theory where 'ethics become, in the last analysis, the study of reality'.⁸ The third element that Carr identifies with Spinoza (and Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Hegel) is 'the realist view that no ethical standards are applicable to relations between states'.⁹ It is this absence of ethical standards that Carr claims enabled Spinoza to argue that 'states could not be blamed for breaking faith; for everyone knew that other states would do likewise if it suited their interests'.¹⁰ Stuart Hampshire sees this as the great advantage of Spinoza's approach to IR: 'The strength of this form of political argument is that it does not rest on changing and disputable moral notions, and can therefore be used persuasively in all circumstances and at all times.'¹¹ Carr's final explicit statement on Spinoza is also related to the legal dimension of international relations in that Spinoza, for Carr, purported to accept natural law but emptied it of meaning 'by virtually identifying it with the right of the stronger'.¹²

Carr's reading of Spinoza is borne out by certain passages from his work. Spinoza makes clear his appreciation of 'that keen observer, Machiavelli', and also his admira-

⁷ Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 62.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹¹ Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, p. 141. Hampshire expands on this point later in the text: 'To speak of "gratitude", "good faith" or "the sanctity of promises" in such contexts is only playing with words; as it is impossible to expect any individual, to act in such a way as will clearly lead to its own destruction of to the loss of its power', p. 150.

¹² Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 161.

tion of 'that acute Florentine'.¹³ Spinoza is dismissive of theorists to an even greater extent than Carr claims, denouncing their bewailing of human nature and denying that they have anything useful to say on practical issues: 'for the most part it is not ethics that they have written, but satire; and they have never worked out a political theory that can have practical application, only one that borders on fantasy or could be put into effect in Utopia'.¹⁴ Carr is also correct in identifying as a theme in Spinoza's work the deterministic elements of Spinoza's analysis of human behaviour: 'he follows the common order of Nature, and obeys it, and accommodates himself to it as far as the nature of things demands'.¹⁵ The law of Nature is harsh in that 'the law of Nature forbids nothing at all except that which is not within anyone's power to do'.¹⁶ Spinoza expands on this theme in the *Theological-Political Treatise*:

From this it follows that Nature's right and her established order, under which all men are born and for the most part live, forbids only those things that no one desires and no one can do; it does not frown on strife, or hatred, or anger, or deceit, nor on anything at all urged by appetite. This is not surprising, for Nature's bounds are set not by the laws of human reason which aim only at man's true interest and his preservation, but by infinite other laws which have regard to the eternal order of the whole of Nature, of which man is but a particle.¹⁷

It is because of the law of Nature that 'sovereign power is bound by no law', and that right is coterminous not with any legal or moral reason, but with power.¹⁸ It is in this context of recognising the primacy of power over law that Spinoza develops his ideas about the permissibility of breaking faith with one's allies. It is considerations of power and interest that produce treaties rooted in calculations of 'fear of loss or hope of gain' that only remain valid as long as those motives pertain. In the absence of interest, 'the tie by which the two commonwealths were bound together automatically disintegrates'.¹⁹ It is in the fundamental realm of the preservation of self-interest that treaties are conceived, executed, and finally dispensed with and a state has 'full right to break a treaty whenever it wishes, and it cannot be said to act treacherously or perfidiously in breaking faith as soon as the reason for fear or hope is removed'.²⁰ Because sovereign right is rooted in power, no statesman can blame another for jeopardising his state by breaking faith with him as the statesman should

¹³ Baruch/Benedict Spinoza, 'Political Treatise', *Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), pp. 700, 747. As Edwin Curley writes, 'Spinoza classes him, not with the philosophers attacked in *Political Treatise* i.1, but with the politicians, who are praised in *Political Treatise* i.2, for having learned from experience to anticipate the wicked conduct of men, and for having, as a result, written successfully about human affairs', 'Kissinger, Spinoza and Genghis Khan', *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 329.

¹⁴ Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, p. 680.

¹⁵ Spinoza, 'Ethics', in *Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), p. 325.

¹⁶ Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, p. 688.

¹⁷ Spinoza, 'Theological-Political Treatise', in *Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), p. 528.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 530.

¹⁹ Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, p. 694. Balibar demonstrates the dynamics of this relationship by means of a domestic analogy: 'Only a superior power (for example, a sovereign who chooses to enforce respect for commitments entered into by a law of the State) can, therefore, prevent contracts from being broken when the interests which led them to be signed no longer exist (TP, II, 12–13). But if this power sought to enforce such a law in a great many simultaneous cases it would thereby put its own power at risk. The same is true of contracts made between States, save that in this case there is no superior authority, and the decisive factor is therefore the interests of the parties involved.' Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 62.

²⁰ Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, p. 694.

not have entrusted his state's security with the contracting party.²¹ At least in this respect then, Carr is correct in his argument that Spinoza equates power and right.²²

Spinoza beyond Carr

Carr's representation of Spinoza is not inaccurate, but it is incomplete. Carr identifies certain aspects of Spinoza's work, but he misses much of the systemic context in which those elements are placed and from which they derive much of their meaning. A possible reason for this incomplete picture is Carr's overreliance on the *Political Treatise*, an important, but unfinished text. Although the *Political Treatise* outlines some elements of Spinoza's political philosophy, it only reveals part of the whole of his thought in these matters. Perhaps the most misleading element of Carr's reading of Spinoza is his claim that ethics is ultimately the 'study of reality' – it is more accurate to state that Spinoza's system begins with reality before considering the means by which that reality could be ameliorated.²³ Spinoza's system is based on confronting human nature in order to understand it, not to condemn it. For this reason, the role of political theory is 'to demonstrate by sure and conclusive reasoning such things as are in closest agreement with practice, deducing them from human nature as it really is ... not to deride, bewail, or execrate human actions, but to understand them'.²⁴

Politics as the Realm of Affect

In contrast to his overreliance on the *Political Treatise*, Carr neglected the *Ethics*. This is surprising as the *Ethics* is the cornerstone of Spinoza's philosophy. Carr seems unaware that it is in the *Ethics* that Spinoza attempts to get to grips with the fundamental realities and deeper political logics that underpin the insights of the *Political Treatise*. Spinoza's focus in the *Ethics* is on the psychological and emotional foundations of political life. David Lay Williams correctly identifies the starting point of Spinoza's project as being the recognition that 'human nature in a state of nature is nothing more than a bundle of emotions' that are dedicated to 'self-preservation ... in myriad conflicting fashions ... Thus, humankind's natural condition is strife and conflict.'²⁵ It is in the *Ethics* that Spinoza claims it is his aim to bring geometric reasoning to the understanding of these human emotions, 'to treat of the nature and strength of the emotions, and the mind's power over them ... and I shall consider

²¹ Ibid., p. 695.

²² Balibar expresses Spinoza's task well in *Spinoza and Politics*: 'Spinoza's purpose here is not to justify the notion of right, but to form an adequate idea of its determinations, of the way in which it works. In this sense, his formula can be glossed as meaning that *the individual's right includes all that he is effectively able to do and to think in a given set of conditions*', p. 59.

²³ See Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 138.

²⁴ Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, p. 681. As Aurelia Armstrong writes, Spinoza's significance lies in the fact that he thought against the grain of seventeenth-century rationalism, regarding the passional nature of human beings as 'the very field of investigation upon which ethical and political theory must be founded', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 17:2 (2009), p. 279.

²⁵ David Lay Williams, 'Spinoza and the General Will', *The Journal of Politics*, 72:2 (April 2010), p. 342. In Balibar's concise articulation, 'Sociability rooted in the passions is therefore necessarily conflictual.' *Spinoza and Politics*, p. 112.

human actions and appetites just as if it were an investigation in lines, planes, or bodies'.²⁶ Perhaps the central concept of the Spinozist enterprise is the *conatus*, the psychological impetus or drive of an entity 'by which [it] endeavours to persist in its own being, [it] is nothing but the given, or actual essence of the thing'.²⁷ Spinoza's thoughts on politics and ethics proceed from a philosophy of flesh in that 'the first thing that constitutes the essence of the mind is the idea of an actually existing body, the basic and most important element of our mind is the ... *conatus* to affirm the existence of our body'.²⁸ It is this centrality of preserving the physical self that drives political existence.²⁹ Beyond the primary aim of survival the human being's life is predicated on pleasure and aversion to pain in all their myriad forms. This pleasure/pain dichotomy finds its fundamental social and political expression in love and hate:

If we imagine that someone is affecting with pleasure the object of our love, we shall be affected with love toward him. If on the other hand we think that he is affecting with pain the object of our love, we shall likewise be affected with hatred toward him.³⁰

Within the realm of affect, the negative emotions of hatred and resentment are more powerful than the positive emotions of love as they set in motion a system based on the reciprocation of injury, to the extent that 'it is evident that men are far more inclined to revenge than to repay a benefit'.³¹ The system perpetuates itself over the generations leading to human beings being prone to hate and envy.³²

To pain and pleasure must be added desire. Desire is a central concept of Spinoza's analysis of human behaviour because '[d]esire is the very essence of man.' The inherent problem with desire is the fact that it pulls the human being in all directions by virtue of being divided against itself: 'I mean by the word "desire" any of man's endeavours, urges, appetites, and volitions, which vary with man's various states, and are not infrequently so opposed to one another that a man may be drawn in different directions and know not where to turn.'³³ Spinoza's unflinching determination to get to the roots of human existence provides an answer as to why the nature of politics is irrational and prone to breakdown – the political, as a social interaction between human beings, is not the realm of reason but rather the realm of the emotions and the affections. Utopian schemes of philosophers fail because they commit the category error of mistaking the political realm for a rational sphere, but a reform that accepts the current condition of human beings and is based on a sense of immanent unfolding of reason and active affects is possible. Human political existence is caught between the rival powers of passion and reason, which give rise to different rights, and rational rights have no primacy, just an occasional and contingent sway over those of the

²⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 278.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 283. Both the human *conatus* and the *conatus* of all things, animate and inanimate, share the striving or tendency to persist in their own forms, but the human *conatus* is different in the sense that it is also linked to specifically human attributes, for example, reason and appetite.

²⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 284.

²⁹ According to Don Garrett, 'The tendency towards self-preservation (perseverance in being) thus becomes, a priori, an essential and defining feature of the natures of all individual things, including all human beings,' Don Garrett, 'Spinoza's Ethical Theory', in Don Garrett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 271.

³⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 290.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 307.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 311–12.

passions: 'these two rights are not symmetrical: if passion excludes and destroys reason, reason does not in itself imply the destruction of every passion – it is merely a superior power which dominates the passions'.³⁴

Escaping the bondage of the emotions: the prescriptions of reason

Spinoza's method is first to identify the nature of life as the product of the emotional impulses common to human beings and to confront the nature of politics as an activity dominated by the desire for self-preservation and advancement of one's interests, or the interests of one's group. Don Garrett has outlined the ultimate outcome of this situation: 'to the extent that human beings are not guided by reason, but are instead subject to passions, they are contrary in nature, and liable to come into conflict with one another'.³⁵ It is only once this process of identification has occurred that it is possible to determine that the human being is at the mercy of his/her emotions, but that these emotions can be checked, if never completely mastered, by reason. To understand Spinoza it is necessary to recognise that there can be no escape from the limits imposed by nature on the human being. Nature cannot be transcended or tamed, improvement can only be a matter of seeking an accommodation between our essential natures and the desire for rational political arrangements. Part of the problem is that the *conatus*, influenced by appetite, has a 'causal efficiency' that the human being only understands inadequately through the concepts of ends and purpose.³⁶ Spinoza's project is to demonstrate that the *conatus*' affirmation of the self can be put to more ordered and harmonious use by reason than that dictated by the emotions.

The extent to which reason is dominated by nature, not *vice versa*, is evident from Spinoza's most concise expression of the relationship between the two:

Since reason demands nothing contrary to nature, it therefore demands that every man should love himself, should seek his own advantage (I mean his real advantage), should aim at whatever really leads a man toward greater perfection, and, to sum it all up, that each man, as far as in him lies, should endeavour to preserve his own being. This is as necessarily true as that the whole is greater than its part.³⁷

The key terms here are the linked categories of 'real advantage', and 'greater perfection'. Perfection for Spinoza lies in the power of activity – the freer an agent is to act according to his or her (necessarily limited) power of self-determination, the greater the degree of perfection he or she attains. To this end, Spinoza introduces a distinction between passive and active emotions – the former emerge in response to external forces acting upon the human being, while the latter are the product of the *conatus* to preserve the self. Human beings are active only insofar as they live under the guidance of reason and the *conatus* of self-preservation. The active life is 'good' as it is by being self-determined that the human being achieves a measure of freedom. This observation is important in that it leads to an important distinction in Spinoza's

³⁴ Balibar, *Spinoza and Ethics*, p. 63.

³⁵ Don Garrett, 'Spinoza's Ethical Theory', p. 277. See also, Andrew Youpa, 'Spinoza's Theory of Motivation', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 88 (2007), p. 387.

³⁶ Andre Santos Campos, 'The Individuality of the State in Spinoza's Political Philosophy', *Archiv für Geschichte Der Philosophie*, 92:1 (2010).

³⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 338.

work between fatalism and determinism. Human behaviour may be determined by their causes, but these causes include the internal causes of reason and active emotions in addition to the external factors that affect decision-making.³⁸

It is at this point that Spinoza's philosophy begins to differ from Carr's representation of his work. By focusing on the *Political Treatise*, Carr sees only a half of Spinoza's project, that is, his articulation of the problem of politics as a sphere of untrammelled desire for power. It is in the *Ethics*, which for whatever reason Carr does not engage with, that Spinoza outlines his solution to this problem. While recognising that 'it is rarely the case that men live by the guidance of reason; their condition is such that they are generally disposed to envy and mutual dislike', nonetheless Spinoza argues that human beings 'discover from experience that they can much more easily meet their needs by mutual help and can ward off ever-threatening perils only by joining forces'. Thus the human being's true advantage is to cooperate in as harmonious a manner as possible.

It is important to note that although Spinoza affirms that the human being is a natural entity, it is not reducible to an animal – the human being is a category of nature *sui generis* and should be understood as such: 'it is a much more excellent thing and worthy of our knowledge to study the deeds of men than the deeds of beasts'.³⁹ According to Warren Montag, Spinoza considered the putative similarity between the affects of humans and animals as contributing to the decline of human freedom in that the human being's 'belief that he is similar to the beasts is thus not so much false in the sense that it does not accurately reflect the true state of affairs as it is destructive of his being, of his power and pleasure'.⁴⁰ Thus although as Nadler argues, '[o]ntologically speaking there is nothing whatsoever that distinguishes a human being from any other particular and determinate mode in nature', the human being is distinct psychologically and intellectually from those other modes.⁴¹

The power of reason allows the human being to create political life *in addition* to nature's laws. In this sense, Spinoza's stress on a fairly brutal natural law is contrasted with an alternative foundation for political life in reason. Spinoza's ethics revolve around accepting the natural, but carving a space for the development of rational ethics. Curley identifies Spinoza's denial of a 'transcendent standard of justice' by which to judge Genghis Khan's actions, but also that: 'this (challenging) normative disclaimer does not imply that there is no other standard by which his actions may be judged. For to say that Genghis Khan acts in accordance with natural right is compatible with saying that he acts contrary to the law of reason ... a genuinely normative claim.'⁴² Reason therefore has 'causal power' in that it can influence the mind to act in a manner consistent with *true advantage* as it is reason that is in a position to determine what real advantage is.⁴³

The positive part of Spinoza's project therefore is concerned with finding an ethics of virtue within the realm of affect. Although concepts of 'good' and 'bad' are meaningless in themselves they are nonetheless useful in developing an ethic within

³⁸ Garrett, 'Spinoza's Ethical Theory', p. 298.

³⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 338.

⁴⁰ Warren Montag, 'Imitating the Affects of Beasts: Interest and Inhumanity in Spinoza', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 20:2/3 (2009), p. 69.

⁴¹ Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 122.

⁴² Curley, 'Kissinger', p. 322.

⁴³ Donald Rutherford, 'Spinoza and the Dictates of Reason', *Inquiry*, 51:5 (2008), p. 496.

the context of an all-encompassing nature.⁴⁴ That which is good is identifiable as such because it assists in promoting the development of Spinoza's model of human nature – the virtuous agent as the 'man guided by reason' who uses reason in order to curb his desire for power and who through active emotional power can contribute to social harmony. Conversely, 'weakness' in human beings is attributable to their not being guided by reason, but by the passive emotions. Although the foundations are relativist, Spinoza creates a normative perspective in which he directs agents towards how they ought to act, that is, to gain their *true* advantage by acting in accordance with reason and the fundamental conatus of self preservation.

Virtue in harmony

Determining 'true' advantage by the active use of reason produces a different political logic to that of obeying the passive emotions that, as we have seen, produce an endless cycle of hate and reciprocal injury. The basis of both virtue and happiness is self-preservation and the means to achieve these ends lies in the creation of social harmony:

Men, I repeat, can wish for nothing more excellent for preserving their own being than that they should all be in such harmony in all respects that their minds and bodies should compose, as it were, one mind and one body, and that all together should endeavour as best they can to preserve their own being, and that all together should aim at the common advantage of all.⁴⁵

To achieve this social harmony men have to surrender their natural rights – it is not a natural harmony of interests and can only be preserved by the conscious use of power 'to prescribe common rules of behaviour and to pass laws to enforce them, not by reason, which is incapable of checking the emotions ... but by threats'.⁴⁶ Within this social context anything that produces or contributes towards harmony is advantageous and therefore good. It is for this reason that hate, the most powerful of the passive emotions, can never be good because it is inherently divisive and produces discord. The man guided by reason therefore does not return hate to hate, but instead tries 'as far as he can to repay with love or nobility another's hatred, anger, contempt, etc. toward himself'.⁴⁷ Although difficult given the lust for revenge, 'it is better to endure their injuries with patience, and to apply oneself to such measures as promote harmony and friendship'.⁴⁸

Despite Spinoza's promotion of reason, he nonetheless recognises that the social and political remain the realms of affect. Although he sees them as inherently problematic in themselves certain emotions are preferable to others. The ideal may 'be to be independent of hope, to free ourselves from fear, and to command fortune as far as we can, and to direct our actions by the sure counsel of reason', but this ideal is

⁴⁴ 'As for the terms "good" and "bad", they likewise indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, and are nothing but modes of thinking, or notions which we form comparing things with one another. For one and the same thing can be good and bad, and also indifferent.' Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 321.

⁴⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 331. See in explanation of this David Lay Williams, 'Spinoza and the General Will', pp. 341–56.

⁴⁶ Spinoza *Ethics*, p. 341.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

unattainable: in order to counter strong passive emotions like hatred, emotions such as hope and fear are required.⁴⁹ In this sense hope and fear represent the emotions of the lesser evil, thus although not good in themselves, they become good by comparison with hate and pride.⁵⁰ It is not enough to act out of fear and hope passively, however, these emotions should be directed by reason to effective ends. A human being is freer when reason directs the emotions and not *vice versa*. The (as Spinoza admits, unachievable) ideal is that 'if men could be guided by reason, all desire that arises from passive emotion would be ineffective'.⁵¹ The key then to achieving an ethical dimension within political life is that those charged with political responsibility:

should pay particular attention to getting to know each emotion, as far as possible, clearly and distinctly, so that the mind may thus be determined from the emotion to think those things that it clearly and distinctly perceives, and in which it finds full contentment. Thus the emotion may be detached from the thought of an external cause and joined to true thoughts. The result will be that not only are love, hatred, etc., destroyed . . . but also that the appetites or desires that are wont to arise from such an emotion cannot be excessive.⁵²

The positive element of Spinoza's project then is a programme of using reason to curb the passions, to enable the individual to assume a more dispassionate perspective on politics:

if we always have in readiness consideration of our true advantage and also of the good that follows from mutual friendship and social relations, and also remember that supreme contentment of spirit follows from the right way of life (Pr. 52, IV), and that men, like everything else, act from the necessity of their nature, then the wrong, or the hatred that is wont to arise from it, will occupy just a small part of our imagination and will easily be overcome.⁵³

This perspective, however, is not something that can be achieved on a universal basis, in which case the best that can be achieved is to foster the joyful emotions, which may perhaps serve the purpose of increasing 'our powers of thinking and acting, bringing us to the brink of adequate understanding and action'.⁵⁴ Spinoza is quite clear that the man guided by reason is distinct from 'the multitude' that does not find freedom in checking emotions and following reason, but rather the individuals who compose it 'think that they are free to the extent that they can indulge their lusts'.⁵⁵ In contrast to the blessedness of the man guided by reason, the multitude can only be induced to obey the commands of reason by means of fear and hope. Viewed from Spinoza's perspective then political life follows one of two paths. The first is to act according

⁴⁹ Spinoza, *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁵⁰ Balibar: 'Individual reason by itself is too weak and must therefore always have recourse to passions that are bad in themselves (that is, are causes of sadness, such as glory, ambition, humility, and so on). In this way, one affect can be used to overcome another', *Spinoza and Politics*, p. 96. Pride is particularly complex in Spinoza's analysis of emotions. Excessive pride, in either exultation of one's own value or self-abasement, is especially problematic, while some positives may be found in 'ordinary' pride.

⁵¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 351.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

⁵⁴ Aurelia Armstrong, 'Natural and Unnatural Communities', p. 303. For Genevieve Lloyd, 'In understanding the passions we do not merely exercise an enjoyable intellectual power which leaves the passions themselves unchanged. This understanding transforms the passions into active, rational emotions – the source of freedom and virtue.' Genevieve Lloyd, *Spinoza and the Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 72.

⁵⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 381.

to the natural inclinations and the reciprocal politics of hate and conflict driven by the emotional motors of anger, revenge, greed, and resentment. The second is to seek what Spinoza regards as the rationally derived true advantage of harmony and mutual interest – to check the emotions, not to surrender to them. The fundamental purpose of politics is to create conditions wherein those who are not guided by reason are coerced or seduced to act as if they were.⁵⁶ For Spinoza, the role of the intellectual is to instruct as many people as possible to seek the second path: 'nowhere can each individual display the extent of his skill and genius more than in so educating men that they come at last to live under the sway of their own reason'.⁵⁷

The deeper Spinozism of Carr's morality

In a manner similar to Spinoza, one of Carr's primary aims was the education of his readers, in various target audiences, including his former diplomatic colleagues, Marxist intellectuals and the general public, about the intricacies of global politics.⁵⁸ The brief chapter of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* entitled 'The Limitations of Realism' is very useful in understanding the nature of Carr's theory of international morality in the context of Spinoza's philosophy. It is in this chapter that Carr argues that '[t]he impossibility of being a consistent and thorough-going realist is one of the most certain and most curious lessons of political science.' This impossibility is rooted in what Carr argues are four elements he judges 'to be essential ingredients of all effective political thinking' and that are missing from 'pure' Realism: 'a finite goal, an emotional appeal, a right of moral judgment and a ground for action'.⁵⁹ These criteria of evaluation lead to an odd conclusion of wider significance in terms of Carr's understanding of Realism, that Realism is divisible into two types – an adulterated but useful Realism that has the potential to inform policy in a progressive manner, and a pure Realism that ultimately leads to crippling cynicism.

In relation to finite goals it has to be admitted that Spinoza does not offer a target or *telos* in the shape of an endpoint of history or a promised land. This is not to argue, however, that Spinoza does not offer a goal. Spinoza's goal is both limited and infinite – limited in the sense that its bounds are determined by the internal and external constraints imposed on the human being by nature, but infinite in the sense that Spinoza's goal, the reformation of human political psychology, can extend to the furthest part of the human future. Spinoza offers a reform of the logic of human interaction not of particular forms, processes, systems, or structures – any such reform would be incidental to the fundamental reform of political mentalities.

This prospect of the reform of political psychology does, however, have an emotional appeal, specifically in a Spinozist sense, an active emotional appeal. Spinoza denies the emotional appeal of Utopia and instead posits the achievement of political-psychological reform as a rational end for those capable of perceiving it as such, but

⁵⁶ Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, p. 94.

⁵⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 359.

⁵⁸ Charles Jones, *E. H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty to Lie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 46–65. On Carr's use of rhetoric see Barry Buzan, Charles Jones, and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 206–8. See also Peter Wilson, 'Radicalism for a Conservative Purpose: The Peculiar Realism of E. H. Carr', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 30:1 (2001), p. 134.

⁵⁹ E. H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 84.

also holding the emotions of hope and fear in reserve for those who can or will not perceive it as such. As demonstrated in the foregoing sections, Spinoza is perhaps the finest philosopher of the emotions in the Western tradition, acutely aware of the powerful appeal of emotions in both their negative and positive capacities to produce effects in political and social life.

Spinoza also offers a right of moral judgment in that he links moral reason with the conatus of self-interest. Spinoza's moral judgment is based on the distinction between 'true advantage' deriving from cooperation and working towards harmony derived from reason, experience, and the conatus for self-interest and the apparent advantage of short term aggrandisement at the expense of others derived from greed, hate, or resentment (the passive emotions). Although Spinoza recognises that in a state of nature to act solely according to appetite is appropriate in that context, and that the agent cannot be condemned as such, it is preferable, but not always achievable, to live according to reason.⁶⁰

Carr considered the ultimate shortcoming of 'consistent' realism to be its failure to offer 'any ground for purposive or meaningful action ... if our thought is irrevocably conditioned by our status and our interests, then both action and thought become devoid of purpose'.⁶¹ Spinoza's position on this point is complicated by his twofold thought in relation to determinism. It is the case that Spinoza considered the human being to be determined by his environment as a particle of nature, yet, he also argues that the human being ought to resist those forces that determine him passively, by instead embracing the determination of active emotions and reason. Spinoza then affirms determinism, but counsels that the grounds of determination should be derived from the individual's intellect and positive affects as far as possible.⁶²

In terms of providing a ground for action, Spinoza is probably guilty of Carr's charge in that he does not provide any *specific* advice on how statesmen should act other than in the context of his existence within and outside the bondage of the emotions. This perspective, however, is not the plane on which Spinoza acts. Spinoza is operating at the political psychological level – seeking to address the deeper, pathological aspects of human behaviour. Spinoza's work is not in this sense devoid of purpose but the purpose cannot be restricted to any set of proposals as to how the international system may be improved, rather he is trying to break the logic of hate and the cycle of recrimination at source – the cause rather than the effect of international discord. Spinoza accepts what is, but strives for what ought to be – it is in this sense that Spinoza is an ethical thinker.

Spinoza then does not conform to Carr's model of *consistent* realism. This failure to achieve the status of pure realism is, however, a positive from Carr's perspective as he draws a clear distinction between 'pure realism' and 'realists who have left their mark on history'. It is this latter category (which includes Machiavelli, Marx, and

⁶⁰ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, pp. 327–34.

⁶¹ Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 86.

⁶² Garrett puts this in the context of a contrast between determinism and fatalism: 'Spinoza is not a fatalist. For although he holds that all volitions, behaviors, and other events are completely determined by their causes, he does not deny that volitions are among the causes of behavior, nor that behaviors are sometimes among the causes of other events ... Spinoza, is, however, a necessitarian; he does hold that everything true is true necessarily. One aspect of his necessitarianism is his determinism: that is, his acceptance of the doctrine that the total state of the universe at any given time plus the laws of nature jointly determine the total state of the universe at any future time.' 'Spinoza's Ethical Theory,' p. 298.

Lenin) of what may be called an 'impure', plural, or hetero-realism that Carr identifies as useful in contrast to a pure realism that 'can offer nothing but a naked struggle for power which makes any kind of international society impossible'.⁶³ Arguably, the whole chapter exists in order to introduce this distinction between two forms of Realism, with Carr clearly aligning his own moral theory with those Realists who have made their mark on history.⁶⁴ Viewed within this context, Carr's parallels with Spinoza become more apparent.

Carr's ethics of the 'ordinary man' – power/right equivalence and the social morality of group persons

Carr's first move in his ethics is exactly the same as Spinoza's, that is, the denial of the significance of the moral code of the philosopher. Carr then introduces a stalking horse, 'the ordinary man', a figure with attitudes markedly similar to Spinoza's practical statesman. Throughout his analysis of international morality Carr makes Spinozist or Spinoza-like claims and arguments. The most significant of these concern the distinction between individual morality and state morality and Carr's awareness of the role of emotions within International Relations.

Carr's employment of 'the ordinary man' and 'most people' allows him to state Spinozist principles such as 'most people, while believing that states ought to act morally, do not expect of them the same kind of moral behaviour which they expect of themselves and one another ... International morality is another category with standards which are in part peculiar to itself.'⁶⁵ The Spinozist recognition of the primacy of self-interest is also recognised by Carr, 'the duty of the group person appears by common consent to be more limited by self-interest than the duty of the individual ... The group person is not commonly expected to indulge in altruism at the cost of any serious sacrifice of its interests.'⁶⁶ The distinction between individual and state morality is made clear by Carr by reference to the relativity of values in a Spinozist argument about the unfixed nature of 'good' and 'bad' acts: 'the ordinary man ... expects from the group person certain kinds of behaviour which he would definitely regard as immoral in the individual. The group is not only exempt from some of the moral obligations of the individual, but is definitely associated with pugnacity and self-assertion, which become positive virtues of the group person.'⁶⁷ Carr provides an example of this peculiar moral character of group persons by reference to the behaviour of the Great Powers as they engage in espionage, an activity that involves deceit, theft and occasionally violence:

No stigma attaches to 'Great Britain' or 'Germany' for acting in this manner; for such practices are believed to be common to all the Great Powers, and a state which did not resort to them might find itself at a disadvantage. Spinoza argued that states would do likewise if it suited their interest. One reason why a higher standard of morality is not expected of states is because states in fact frequently fail to behave morally and because there are no means of compelling them to do so.⁶⁸

⁶³ Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 87.

⁶⁴ See Charles Jones, *E. H. Carr: A Duty to Lie*, pp. 53–4.

⁶⁵ Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 143.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

As a group person acting within a limited 'social morality' what the state can achieve is circumscribed by its circumstances. In a manner practically identical to Spinoza, Carr insists on a power/right equivalence, finding international society's rights to be intrinsically linked with the power of leading states:

The trouble is not that Guatemala's rights and privileges are only proportionately, not absolutely, equal to those of the United States, but that such rights and privileges as Guatemala has are enjoyed only by the good will of the United States. The constant intrusion, or potential intrusion, of power renders almost meaningless any conception of equality between members of the international community.⁶⁹

It is the patent lack of equality between states, or the presence of a higher authority that makes international law an inadequate basis for achieving international morality. Like Spinoza, Carr is sceptical towards international law, and sees it as a second order instrument of power:

Society cannot live by law alone, and law cannot be the supreme authority . . . Every system of law presupposes an initial political decision, whether explicit or implied, whether achieved by voting or by bargaining or by force, as to the authority entitled to make and unmake law. Behind all law there is this necessary political background. The ultimate authority of law derives from politics.⁷⁰

It is this reasoning that leads Carr to assert that any 'international moral order must rest on some hegemony of power'.⁷¹ Legal institutions and processes without genuine power for Carr are merely blind alleys from which we have to extricate ourselves.⁷²

Carr and the emotions

Carr's focus on power/morality equivalence is not the only major feature that he shares with Spinoza. Carr is also deeply concerned with the role of the emotions in the conduct of international relations and their impact on the moral realm and the prospects for peaceful change. Carr's criticism of Realism, that it does not allow for the 'emotional, irrational appeal' of finite goals, is extended in the chapter on international morality into a Spinozist concern with the affective realm of emotions. In general, Carr recognises 'the initial difficulty' of ascribing emotions, 'which play a large part in individual morality' to states, but he argues that states and other group actors can and do act compassionately:

we do, in certain circumstances, expect states and other group persons, not merely to comply with their formal obligations, but to behave generously and compassionately. And it is precisely this expectation which produces moral behaviour on behalf of a fictitious entity like a bank or a state . . . states make compassionate grants because public opinion expects it of them. The moral impulse may be traced back to individuals. But the moral act is the act of the group person.⁷³

In a manner similar to Spinoza, emotions underpin the moral frameworks of political life for Carr: 'Loyalty to the group comes to be regarded as a cardinal virtue of the individual', even when this is problematic in that it 'may require him to condone

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 149.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 166.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 151.

⁷² Ibid., p. 189.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 144.

behaviour by the group person which he would condemn in himself'.⁷⁴ Such is the emotional power of the state that it 'demands from the individual a far more intensive loyalty and far graver sacrifices'.⁷⁵ A further complication of emotions is that they prevent any form of universal identification based on common membership of humanity. There are, for Carr, layers of intimacy that allow those closest to us greater standing in our decision making: 'Most men's sense of common interest and obligation is keener in respect of family and friends than in respect of others of their fellow-countrymen, and keener in respect of their fellow-countrymen than of other people ... We all apply, consciously or unconsciously, some such standard of relative values.'⁷⁶ One of the primary contributing factors to the persistence of the weakness of international society is the emotional pull of loyalty to the nation.⁷⁷

Appeasement as the culmination of power and emotion

Both of Carr's Spinozist themes combine in relation to what he calls peaceful change, which finds its most controversial expression in Carr's advocacy of appeasement.⁷⁸ Appeasement for Carr makes sense in terms of accommodating the interests and power of the 'have' and 'have-not' powers in that it allows the satiated powers to retain their hegemony of power within the system, while also recognising the claims of revisionist powers. In Spinozist terms, appeasement of this kind would represent the achievement of the 'true advantage' of both parties. The period of the twenty years' crisis itself is framed in a Spinozist logic of the primacy of power and self-interest and the weakness of law to achieve any measure of effective justice. The Spinozist logic of the lesser evil is clear from one of the deleted passages from the first edition:

If the power relations of Europe in 1938 made it inevitable that Czecho-Slovakia should lose part of her territory, and eventually her independence, it was preferable (quite apart from any question of justice or injustice) that this should come about as the result of discussions round a table in Munich rather than as the result of a war between the Great Powers or of a local war between Germany and Czecho-Slovakia.⁷⁹

This passage allows us to distinguish Carr's ethics from an ethic based on the primacy of justice – his (and Spinoza's) ethics do not revolve around justice, but rather on the preservation of one's own community and international order – this is not the realm of *fiat justitia, pereat mundus*. Spinoza and Carr are clearly more concerned with an ethics of adjustment than with the delineation and execution of claims to justice. Carr also undermines the claims of justice by arguing that the issue of justice is 'the question that immediately exercises the minds' of those faced with a demand for change, but that this concept is in itself viewed through the prism of

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 144.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 145.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 148.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 150.

⁷⁸ For the contemporary context and long-term disciplinary impact of Carr's support for appeasement, see Ian Hall, 'Power Politics and Appeasement: Political Realism in British International Thought, 1935–1955', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 8:2 (2006).

⁷⁹ Quoted in Michael Cox, 'From the First to the Second Editions of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*: A Case of Self-Censorship?', Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. lxxvi.

interest, which colours and maybe even wholly determines it.⁸⁰ It is significant that Carr explicitly ties his project to 'hope' – one of Spinoza's more acceptable emotions – that the dissatisfied powers will become satisfied by the self-interested sacrifice of the satisfied powers and the rational adjustment of international society. This sort of calculation demonstrates, as Peter Wilson has claimed, that 'Carr was not "running away from the notion of good" so much as pointing out that "good" was a good deal more complicated than many people made it out to be.'⁸¹

The Spinozist focus on affect is particularly present in Carr's identification of the problems of international relations as attributable to an underdeveloped 'common feeling between nations' and it is this lack of emotional sense that played a major contributory role in the failure to achieve a genuine peace with Germany after the war. Such community as existed in international society was 'torn asunder by the War, when malice and all uncharitableness became the watchwords of every belligerent', leaving 'a legacy of hatred' in its wake.⁸² In *Britain: A Study in Foreign Policy*, Carr makes clear the impact of the frenzied indignation of the combatants in poisoning relations in its aftermath: 'These emotions could not be suddenly extinguished at the signing of the armistice; and they exercised a dominant influence on the terms of the peace treaties.'⁸³ These emotions, further stirred up by statesmen eager to avoid domestic social unrest were projected onto the defeated enemy or the Soviet Union, with the effect that these statesmen, 'were now in large measure their captives'.⁸⁴

This emotional context has to be seen in the wider Spinozist sense of Germany's lack of power to gain its rights:

Unfortunately, Germany was almost wholly deficient for fifteen years after 1918 in that power which is, as we have seen, a necessary motive force in political change; and this deficiency prevented effect being given, except on a minor scale, to the widespread consensus of opinion that parts of the Versailles Treaty ought to be modified. By the time Germany regained her power, she had adopted a completely cynical attitude about the role of morality in international politics.⁸⁵

The tragedy of the *interbellum* was that had a certain amount of emotional intelligence been employed by the satiated powers, instead of Clemenceau's vindictive desire for punishment and the attribution of guilt, powerful passive emotions, then the German polity would not in turn have succumbed to the Nazis, who cynically exploited the emotions of the Germans and who displayed a blatant disregard for the standards of civilisation.⁸⁶ In contrast to Stresemann, who 'had ignored the hate-

⁸⁰ Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 199.

⁸¹ Peter Wilson, 'Carr and his Early Critics: Responses to *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 1939–1946', in Michael Cox (ed.), *E. H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 187.

⁸² Carr, 'Honour Among Nations', *Fortnightly* (May 1939), p. 499.

⁸³ E. H. Carr, *Britain: A Study of Foreign Policy from the Versailles Treaty to the Outbreak of War* (London: Longmans, Green, 1939), p. 148.

⁸⁴ E. H. Carr, 'The Versailles Fiasco', *Times Literary Supplement* (6 June 1968), p. 565.

⁸⁵ Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 201.

⁸⁶ In his account of his time as a member of the British delegation to the Treaty of Versailles, Carr records, 'I was outraged by French intransigence and by our [the British] unfairness to the Germans, whom we cheated over the "Fourteen Points" and subjected to every petty humiliation.' E. H. Carr, 'An Autobiography', in Cox, *E. H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, p. xvi. Carr here reflects a common belief at the time, perhaps best exemplified by John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1919) that Germany had been subject to a vindictive and punitive peace. Margaret Macmillan argues that this common perception was mistaken, that the Treaty was not vindictive and, in particular, it was not harshly enforced. Margaret Macmillan, *The Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and its Attempt to End War* (London: John Murray, 2001).

complex in German politics in the hope that it would gradually dissolve unnoticed. Hitler recognised it', and oriented his policies accordingly.⁸⁷ After the rise to power of the Nazis, the cycle of hate and recrimination asserted its grip on all the participants, with a newly empowered Germany dismantling by force and confrontation of the system that had been imposed upon it by the victorious powers, destroying 'the limited stock of common feeling which had formerly existed'.⁸⁸

Carr's advocacy of appeasement demonstrates his Spinozist understanding of the international society in that it was a policy prescription based on a clinically detached analysis of power within that system. The purpose of appeasement was to break the cycle of hatred, violence, and recrimination by a combination of self-interest and an awareness of the need to balance hate and anger with a dispassionate, rational response.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, in Hitler and the Nazis political reality found the ultimate expression of politics as lust for revenge and destruction – affirming Spinoza and Carr's analysis of the problem of politics as an emotional and irrational activity rooted in the desire for power and highlighting the limitations of their solutions based in the power of reason. Carr and Neville Chamberlain, both 'men guided by reason' in the Spinozist sense, found their attempts at securing or promoting a realistic peace overwhelmed by individuals in thrall to the passive emotions. In his autobiographical sketch written to Tamara Deutscher, Carr reflected on his failure to assess accurately the danger of Nazi Germany – 'I don't think it was till 1938, after the occupation of Austria, that I began to think of Hitler as a serious danger. No doubt I was very blind.' Carr attributed this blindness to his own indignation at the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and initially viewed Hitler's actions as 'rectification of an old injustice'.⁹⁰ Carr's ultimate verdict on appeasement was that it failed not in principle, but in execution, as it was merely one part of a fatally flawed foreign policy that in its various aspects ultimately succeeded in alienating both Germany and the USSR:

I began to take notice of rumours of secret contacts between Moscow and Berlin, and to find them plausible. It seemed to me folly for the British Government to pursue a line which antagonised both. As I became less inclined to appease Hitler, I became more inclined to appease Stalin. I remember seeing the guarantee of 1 April 1939, to Poland as the final recipe for disaster. We could not possibly implement it except in alliance with Russia and it was given in such a way as to preclude any such agreement.⁹¹

Carr is here arguing in Spinozist terms that the failure of appeasement was due to the British not thinking correctly about the nature of international politics and alliance formation. This in turn was caused by British foreign policy being divided into two camps – 'one recommending an attitude of firmness and intransigence in all dealings with Germany, the other an attitude of conciliation and concession . . . It was perhaps

⁸⁷ John Hallett (E. H. Carr), 'The Prussian Complex,' *Fortnightly Review* (1 Jan 1933), p. 43.

⁸⁸ Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 201.

⁸⁹ 'Was it not possible', wrote Carr in *Britain: A Study in Foreign Policy*, 'by substituting a consistent policy of conciliation and concession – which had never yet been tried – for one of intransigence and criticism, to bring about a *détente* with one or more of the potentially hostile powers?', p. 167.

⁹⁰ Carr, 'An Autobiography', p. xix in Michael Cox, *E. H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). The mistreatment of the Germans in the Treaty of Versailles is one of the few instances in his work where justice plays an important role – and this is as much a question of political mismanagement as moral critique.

⁹¹ E. H. Carr, 'An Autobiography', p. xix. Carr believed that the only tangible success of appeasement was that it kept the Italians out of the war – at least at the beginning.

the main cause of the chronic indecision and consequent bankruptcy of British policy in Central Europe after 1919 that neither view rallied sufficient support to prevail for any length of time over the other.⁹² The situation was further compromised by Britain's refusal to engage in serious negotiations with the Soviet Union. By ruling out alliance with the Soviets, the British effectively endangered their own safety – ignoring the fundamental task of statecraft, which is to ensure peace and security by means of prioritising self-interest over disgust at the questionable values of one's potential allies, at least until such time as the immediate danger has passed.

Ethics versus morality in Spinoza and Carr

Gilles Deleuze makes an important distinction between ethics and morality in Spinoza's work that can be extended to that of Carr. The difference between morality and ethics lies in their fundamental purposes: morality, based on transcendent values is a 'system of Judgment', derived from a concept of God as judge employing a series of eternal and timeless laws to a subject population.⁹³ Ethics is quite distinct in that it is predicated on an 'ethical test', which instead of being concerned with restoring a moral order, or applying a judgment derived from that order, 'confirms, here and now, the immanent order of essences and their states. Instead of a synthesis that distributes rewards and punishments the ethical test is content with analyzing our chemical composition (the test of gold or clay).'⁹⁴ In other words, the ethical test is concerned with whether an action has value or is worthless in any given situation. According to Deleuze the 'ethical question falls then, in Spinoza, into two parts: *How can we come to produce active affections?* But first of all: *How can we come to experience a maximum of joyful passions?*'⁹⁵ To put this in other terms, how to break the stranglehold of the hateful passions and replace them with something more positive? This leads to a distinction between an ethics based on determining good and bad things, as opposed to a morality based on fixed categories of Good and Evil. This is crucial because a 'distinction between good things and bad provides the basis for a real ethical difference, which we must substitute for a false moral opposition'.⁹⁶ The good then equates with the advantageous – which leads to a human and social concept of 'the good':

And if it be asked what is most useful to us, this will be seen to be man. For man in principle agrees in nature with man; man is absolutely or truly useful to man. Everyone, then, in seeking what is truly useful to him, also seeks what is useful to man. The effort to organize encounters is thus first of all the effort to form an association of men in relations that can be combined.⁹⁷

Ethics then is about encounters and relations – good encounters and relations produce positive affects and lend themselves to order and harmony, evil or bad, by contrast, '*is always a bad encounter*, evil is always the decomposition of a relation'.⁹⁸

⁹² E. H. Carr, *Britain: A Study in Foreign Policy*, p. 149.

⁹³ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988), p. 23.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), p. 246, emphasis in original.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁹⁷ Deleuze, *Expressionism*, p. 261.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 247, emphasis in original.

This theme of decomposition of relations reflects perfectly Carr's analysis of the ethical situation in Europe between the wars. In this light, appeasement is an ethical attempt to come to terms with the decomposition of European international society, as evidenced by Carr's defence of the British negotiators at Munich:

From first to last, neither the British Government nor Lord Runciman advocated cession or any other solution on its own merits. They were concerned as mediators to work for whatever solution offered the possibility of preserving peace; and both eventually came to the conclusion that cession was the only solution which satisfied that condition.⁹⁹

In this sense, the commitment to peace is an ethical as opposed to a moral decision. As Michael Cox argues, Carr was not a 'blind enthusiast' for appeasement for the sake of appeasement, once it was clear that it failed as a policy in relation to Hitler, Carr moved on.¹⁰⁰

Although he uses the terms ethics and morality interchangeably, in Spinozist terms, Carr is producing an ethics of IR, and in doing so providing a critique of the pretensions of liberal morality, which according to Carr, transforms 'a conflict between the desiderata of different nations into a moral conflict between Good and Evil, which has helped so much to embitter international relations at the present time'.¹⁰¹ Carr does not sit in judgment of Germany, or even Hitler.¹⁰² Throughout his analyses of Germany in the 1930s, his aim is to analyse the cause of the problem and to seek the means to remedy it. The problem for Carr has two causes, first the very application of the victors' will to judgement compelling the Germans, 'to subscribe to the most ruthless and sweeping moral condemnation in history' which exacerbated the other cause, Germany's sense of inferiority.¹⁰³ The moral indignation of the victors blinded them to the true advantage of incorporating Germany into international society early and effectively, which would have been to the true advantage of all parties, instead, various parties in Britain and France were determined to punish Germany and render her a pariah, with the result being the 'admission of Germany to the League of Nations was bungled. Between 1926 and 1929 no serious attempt was made to remedy German grievances. These were the years of wasted opportunity, when willingness to meet Germany's still modest claims might have produced real appeasement.'¹⁰⁴ By not dealing with Stresemann (a man guided by reason), the allies in effect paved the way for Hitler (a man guided by his passions) as the Germans, 'drew the inevitable conclusion that force was the only method of breaking the fetters of Versailles; the Weimar Republic toppled to its fall'.¹⁰⁵

The appeasement of Hitler for Carr was an attempt to stave off the consequences of acting according to the passive emotions and a morality that contributed in no

⁹⁹ E. H. Carr, 'Hostile Views of Munich. A Polemic and a Record' (review of R. W. Seton-Watson, *Munich and the Dictators*), *Times Literary Supplement* (11 March 1939), p. 142.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Cox, 'Introduction', *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. xxvii.

¹⁰¹ E. H. Carr, 'Honour Among Nations: A Critique of International Cant', *The Fortnightly* (May 1939), p. 492.

¹⁰² In 'Impressions of a Visit to Russia and Germany', Carr writes that he did not 'think it any use to talk of the wickedness of one side of the other, whether Hitler is wickeder than Stalin or the converse is true. The question of personal wickedness and good and bad fairies can be left to the fairy tale school of history which I hope is, today, nearly extinct.' quoted in Jonathan Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity*, p. 78.

¹⁰³ Hallett/Carr, 'The Prussian Complex', p. 40.

¹⁰⁴ Carr, *Britain: A Study in Foreign Policy*, p. 152.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

small measure to his rise. The period 1933–9 reveals most starkly the connection between power and ethics. For Carr, a largely disarmed and economically weakened Britain simply could not have engaged in a policy of confrontation with Germany, in Spinozist terms, it lacked the power to enforce any right to do so as ‘down to 1938, the armament situation made a policy of conciliation the only practical one. The alternative was a policy of hostile words which could not be reinforced by military action.’¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

It is clear that Paul Rich is correct in his assessment that *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* represents, ‘a plea for a rethinking of the moral purpose of international politics’,¹⁰⁷ yet the failure of appeasement as a policy provokes a question – ‘what remains worthwhile in the ethical and political theories of Carr and, by extension, Spinoza?’ The answer may be found in a distinction between analysis and prescription.

The problem with both Carr and Spinoza lies not with their diagnoses of the problems of IR and ethics, but rather with their prescriptions. Both authors recognise the weakness of reason in relation to the natural drives and impulses of human beings, yet neither can resist the temptation to make reason the basis of their attempts to restrain impulse and emotion.¹⁰⁸ It is in this sense that both are open to the criticism that Morgenthau makes of Carr, that his was a ‘mind which has discovered the phenomenon of power and longs to transcend it’.¹⁰⁹ Morgenthau goes on to argue that Carr, lacking a transcendent point outside politics, cannot but fail in his synthesis of realism and utopianism.¹¹⁰

Morgenthau, however, overstates the case for Carr’s failure. Carr himself anticipates Morgenthau style criticism of appeasement: ‘there is a common inclination in politics to take the deterministic view that any policy which fails was bound to fail and should, therefore, never have been tried’. The simple facts of the matter for Carr precluded a politics of confronting Hitler:

British opinion had long ago recognised that the military restrictions, the demilitarisation of the Rhineland and the separation of Austria from Germany could not be maintained indefinitely and that the only issue was the date and manner of their disappearance; and one of the most obvious factors in the crisis of September 1938 was that Britain would not fight to maintain a

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 176. Carr’s analysis largely chimes with but ultimately departs from that of contemporary historians such as Richard Overy in that Overy argues that Britain could not have realistically fought a war much earlier than 1939, where they differ is in the question of preparing for war: in *The Road to War*, Overy uncovers evidence that Britain had begun to plan for war with Germany as early as 1934. Britain’s rearmament programme envisaged 1939 as the year in which it would reach peak preparedness: a war before this date would be fought with inadequate weapons, a war fought much after this date would be conducted at a disadvantage as the German capacity for war would reach its peak in the early 1940s. For Overy, Munich was conducted in the *hope* that Hitler might be satisfied with the Sudetenland, but it was also an attempt to stall for time in order to enable the final phases of war preparedness.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Rich, ‘E. H. Carr and the Quest for Moral Revolution in International Relations’, p. 207.

¹⁰⁸ Carr was later to restate the limits of reason’s ability to curtail the passions: ‘exhortations to human beings to behave rationally and not emotionally, like exhortations to love one another, are liable to fall on deaf ears.’ E. H. Carr, ‘Conflicts of Interest’, (Review of Erich Fromm, *May Man Prevail?*) *Times Literary Supplement* (21 September 1962), p. 745.

¹⁰⁹ Hans Morgenthau, ‘The Political Science of E. H. Carr’, *World Politics*, 1:1 (1948), p. 129.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 133–4.

Czechoslovak state which, in a population of 14,000,000 contained 3,250,000 Germans and other large and disloyal minorities. It cannot be charged to the policy of conciliation that these concessions were made. The only ground for criticism is that they were not made in other conditions and at an earlier date.¹¹¹

Even if we allow that both Carr and Spinoza's prescriptions are either unsuccessful or vague, their analytical insights into the dynamics of power and ethics in political life remain valuable to the study of international politics.¹¹² The primary advantage of engaging with these authors lies in the extent to which they provide significant insights into *understanding* political existence and the nature and limits of global ethics. When read in tandem, Carr and Spinoza's works contribute to uncovering not merely the political logics and ethical challenges that continue to characterise IR, but also the anthropological, psychological, and sociological dimensions of international political life. Finally, perhaps the most important finding of both the IR theorist Carr and the philosopher Spinoza is that both these Realist thinkers 'who have made their mark on history' identify the importance of emotion as a category of analysis and demonstrate (even if they occasionally underestimate) the power the emotions have over political existence.

¹¹¹ E. H. Carr, *Britain*, p. 175.

¹¹² One of Carr's early critics, A. L. Rowse, remarks positively on Carr's 'manful' attempts to 'think out anew the nature of politics' but condemns what he calls his 'Chamberlainism', which he advises Carr to omit from future editions. A. L. Rowse, 'Review of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*', *The Economic Journal*, 51:201 (1941), pp. 92–5. For a further articulation of Carr's 'mistakes', but also the long term benefits of his theory viewed separately from those mistakes, see also Peter Wilson, 'E. H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. Appearance and Reality in World Politics', *Politik*, 12:4 (2009), pp. 21–5.